DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 040 246 UD 010 186

AUTHOR Mihalka, Joseph A.
TITLE Pre-testing Orientation for the Disadvantaged.
PUB DATE Mar 70
NOTE 4p.; Paper presented at the American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, New Orleans, La., March 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
DESCRIPTORS *Disadvantaged Youth, *Educational Programs, *Occupational Tests, *Pretesting, Sequential Programs, *Testing Problems, Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

A pre-testing orientation was incorporated into the Work Incentives Program, a pre-vocational program for disadvantaged youth. Test-taking skills were taught in seven and one half hours of instruction and a variety of methods were used to provide a sequential experience with distributed learning, positive reinforcement, and immediate feedback of results to the participants. For example, a dart throwing game was used to reduce anxiety about test-taking and to illustrate the game aspects of testing. Rapport between tester and testees was encouraged by having the tester also conduct training sessions. Students were also given time to become familiar with test facilities, tests, and equipment in addition to experience with taking short timed tests. Sequential instruction helped students become familiar with simple non-standardized tests and procedures through the standardized tests used by the Employment Service. Although no evaluation design has been developed to measure results, it is assumed that, through reduction of anxiety, development of test-taking skills, and improved motivation and attitudes toward testing, the trainee would improve his test scores. (KG)

PRE-TESTING ORIENTATION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

Presentation by:
Jos. A. Mihalka
Chief of Testing
The Ohio Bureau of Employment Services
Columbus, Ohio

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Current social concerns regarding the appropriateness of existing tests and procedures with the disadvantaged has dealt primarily with the technical aspects of test selection, content, and interpretation of results. A frequently overlooked problem relates to the variables that are largely based on experience or learning that can influence test performance and scores. Among these are test-taking skills, attitude and interest, motivation, and an understanding or appreciation of the need or reasons for testing.

The test research section in Ohio first became involved in pre-testing orientation in a special E. and D. project of pre-vocational preparation of disadvantaged youth in 1967. Instruction and practice in test-taking skills was provided through lectures and group discussion. This part of the program was well received by the trainees, but the lack of an experimental design, control group, and replication failed to establish the specific value or influence of the orientation.

UD010186

In 1968, the funding of the Work Incentive Program (WIN) for welfare recipients provided for a two to three week orientation program, an important part of which was seven and one half hours of instruction (five one and a half hour sessions) in test-taking skills. A variety of techniques and methods were utilized to provide a sequential experience with distributed learning, positive reinforcement, and immediate feedback of results to the participants.

In an attempt to reduce anxiety and develop some concepts of tests and scoring, each applicant was asked to take part in a dart-throwing game. Individual scores were kept, averages calculated, and opportunities given for practice to illustrate improvement in performance. This innovation was used

to illustrate the game aspects of testing, that essentially a test could be a form of competition or contest in which the individual not only compares his scores with others but also looks at his own performances. Even trainees with low levels of arithmetic were quick to grasp the idea of average performance and scoring. The dart board was a popular diversion during breaks and prior to the start of daily sessions.

The sessions were conducted by the local office test examiner or a counselor who, at a later time, would administer standardized tests. Sessions were held in the testing rooms. The rationale was to develop rapport between the trainees and the test examiner and to familiarize them with the test facilities, the tests, and equipment. Short timed tests were utilized to develop concepts and practice of proper use and set for highly timed tests.

The sequential nature of the instruction provided a method for progress from simple non-standardized tests and procedures to the standardized tests used by the Employment Service. These range through the diagnostic Metropolitan Achievement Tests, and the non-reading measure of "G", as well as non-reading parts of the General Aptitude Test Battery, to the full battery of the B-1001 or B-1002 Forms.

The purpose of the orientation was to provide a structured learning experience for those persons who lacked test-taking skills because of cultural or environmental deprivation. No attempt was made to tutor in specific tests, other than simple exposure to practice items frequently found in public sources of information. It was hoped that, through the reduction of anxiety, development of test-taking skills, improved motivation and attitudes toward testing, and a better understanding of the reasons for tests, the trainee would perform better on the tests, thus providing more valid results. The attempt was to remove the barriers or variables that were environmental or attitudinal.

The pre-testing orientation in WIN has been in use for about a year. It has been favorably received by the trainees and E. S. staff but, as yet, no specific research has been conducted to determine its significance or

real value. We are in the process of developing a research design for a standardized orientation to be administered to experimental groups and compared to control groups which would not be given the orientation.

Presently all persons in the WIN orientation receive pre-test training. However, questions should be asked in regard to who needs this orientation, how much, and what kind. Probably not all persons need seven and a half hours of preparation, but certainly there is a serious need for more than the all too brief canned introductions that are so commonly used.

Current research in Ohio includes the development of standardized instructions with charts, practice exercises, taped material, and test examiner's instructions. Also, in this regard a worksheet is being developed to assist the counselor in forming a profile of the trainee, which in turn, will be used to plan pre-test orientation and the sequence for the administration of standardized tests. A final aspect of the research involves a worksheet to record the test-taking behavior of the trainees, as a supplement to the test results. Other research being considered will cover three different types of orientation with varying times, content, and purpose according to the individual's needs.

Most standardized tests today frankly report the limitations of their use, but it remains for the counselor or test examiner to operate within these limitations. The continuing work on culture free or fair tests has not been fruitful, but pre-testing orientation may at least provide for the more fair use of standardized tests. Care in preparing the individual for testing may be the most critical aspect of obtaining valid performance. Until the test developers themselves give more attention to pre-test instructions, it is the ethical obligation of counselors and test examiners to use innovations which will help disadvantaged persons to become more test-wise and thus have a better chance for success.

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